

Allah has no care for us, we are only women; we may never enter a mosque; our brightest hope is a heaven by ourselves, to be gained by obedience to our husbands. They must ignore us abroad, at home they beat us. We reckon ourselves as the wild beasts. We are deceitful, profane, debased, but how can we be any better if they who know a more excellent way have no interest even to listen to our story, or to send us help."

With a dreary sigh, which was echoed by all, she led the way and they passed on. For very shame I hid my face, but was constrained to look up as there tottered toward me a vast company whose crippled feet proclaimed them from the Chinese empire. The almond eyes of the leader fastened on me as she said:—"Your parents rejoiced once because God had given them a daughter; your welfare has been consulted in everything: nature was not interfered with, and your feet will carry you whithersoever you will; education has been freely yours; evil has been carefully eradicated, and to-day you pride yourself on your keen sense of right and wrong. Our parents were disgraced by our birth; if they had murdered us, no one would have interfered. We were crippled from childhood; our education was confined to lessons of obedience to our fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons; beyond our own doors we are forbidden to be known either for good or evil. Unable to read, ranked by our most advanced thinkers with the monkeys and parrots, what wonder if we are superstitious, depraved, and vicious? O American woman, who hath made us to differ, and by what right are you 'not interested' in us?"

Before I could have spoken, if I had desired, they had passed forward and their place was filled with short, robust figures, clad in mantles of tanned skin, leather petticoats, and short beaded aprons. Beads of all varieties, buttons, buckles, and rings of iron and copper decorated their stout figures in many fantastic ways.

They marched entirely around the platform, closely scanning me, before anyone spoke; then the leader said:—"Free to come or go, no terror in her life, at liberty to marry or not, certain of protection from any abuse, surely, sisters, this a favored woman. We of Africa are chattels. We must marry whom our fathers choose and be one of one of many wives, subject to every caprice of our husband. If he commands us not to stand upright before him, henceforth we must crawl in his presence, on pain of cruel punishment. If he favors one of us, disfigurement or death awaits her from her jealous companions; unless he favors us, he beats or kills us as he chooses, with none to interfere; we are his, body and soul. Unmarried, we form the estate of our father or brother, to be divided at his death among the heirs. But this woman is 'not interested' in us; she cares not that to us no heaven is promised equal to what she now enjoys; we are too far off. O, God of America, are we too far off for Thee to care? Is there no help for us? Is Thy child a true representative of Thee?"

A cold terror was settling upon me and I looked for some escape from the place, but even as I looked, before me were flashing jewels, rich silks, and costly apparel. With eyes as bright as her jewels, a woman cried, passionately:—"Would you like to know our story? We were born in far-off India. We were all married before we were ten, some of us before we were three years old. We were taken to our husband's home to be slaves to his mother, to cook his food and send it to him, awaiting outside our portion from whatever he might leave. In sickness no physician must see or touch us; we are taken out and laid by the Ganges, the sight of whose holy waters is to cleanse our sins. After death the same sacred

stream will receive our ashes. Forbidden to sew or read, our only occupation is to quarrel with our associate wives; and so we live with no purpose, and die with no hope. But we are the favored ones in fair India; ours is the enviable lot; you shall see our unhappy sisters, to whose condition we may be reduced at any moment."

She waved her hand and her followers fell back, leaving a space before me which was immediately filled with the most sorrowful faces that had yet appeared. Here were no jewels or silks, but scanty cotton garments, uncombed hair, and eyes heavy with woe. Their speaker stepped forward and tremblingly said:—"We are widows. When our husbands died our ornaments were stripped from us, and we became slaves to all about us. We may never change our condition, but must live on, sleeping on the floor with but a mat beneath us, eating but one scant meal a day, fasting twenty-four hours once a fortnight, eating apart from others, forbidden even to see others happy. We must have no society, and no one must show us a kindness. Blows and curses are our portion, and death our only release."

As her voice ceased she, too, waved her followers back, and instantly my platform was surrounded by little girls, the oldest under six. Such drawn, pitiful, wan faces I hope never to see again. They lifted pleading hands and raised beseeching eyes to mine as they begged:—"O, Christian lady, pray to your God for us. We are widows already, and this woe is ours for life. Look at the petted children of your land; think of the curly heads and laughing eyes that you love in your homes. Look at our tired feet, our bruised arms, and remember how tenderly you hold the tiny hands and guide the dainty feet of your darlings. We beg you to spare one thought, utter one little prayer for us, for we number eighty thousand under six years old." Eighty thousand pairs of eyes looked wistfully into mine for a minute, but suddenly a voice said—"It is useless; her Saviour said—'Suffer little children to come unto me,' but *she* is 'not interested.'"

The faint hope died out of their faces and they all vanished.

Noting the tears on my face, the fair one at my side asked—"Need I do more to interest you in missions?"

"You!" I stammered; "who are you?"

"I am Conscience," she replied, "and I stand here to tell you that your vision of to-night is no disordered dream. I have brought truth to your door; shall it knock in vain? I gave you an elevated position, for you are above the sisters whom you have seen, but the platform that raises you is the Rock—Christ Jesus. Will you be content to stand there alone, or have you at last interest to spare for the nations low in the dust at the feet of Allah and Brahma? Will you help them up, or will you choose to hear your Redeemer say to you—'Inasmuch as ye do it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me?'"

For answer I fell on my knees and Conscience left me, satisfied to have brought me to my God, knowing that she could trust my waking with Him. To a pitiful Saviour I confessed all my pride and indifference. He forgave me; then I slept sweetly and refreshingly. The next morning I hastened to the house of my friend the collector, took back my heartless words of the night before, and gave her double what she had asked. That morning was the beginning of a new life to me, for I promised my Saviour that henceforth His cause should be mine, and that I would give to the women of other lands as freely as I had received from Him; and I pray God to keep me from ever being again so fast asleep as I was on that night when asked to contribute to foreign missions.—*Dr. Cummings in Gospel in all Lands.*